

"New Women- New Art": A Festival of Women Artists

by Sandra West

There is a Black women's revolution "carryin' on." An artistic revolution of women speaking as liberators and mothers and lovers, as Earth Women, as validators of the Black Aesthetic and overseers of our precious traditions. The literature of Black women is a predominate, but not exclusive, realization of this revolution. For example, in 1987 Rita Dove won the Pulitzer Prize for her volume of poems, *Thomas and Beulah* (Carnegie-Mellon University Press). In 1988, novelist Toni Morrison captured the Pulitzer for her masterful, magical *Beloved* (Alfred Knopf). The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and Oxford University Press chose 1988 to publish *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*, a mammoth 30-volume treasure.

In addition to the literature, Black women are speaking through music, theatre and dance. All of these disciplines, and the herculean women "carryin' on" African-American traditions through them, were gathered together in a five-day Spring festival called "New Women-New Art" produced by Philip Thomas of the Carter G. Woodson Foundation in Newark, New Jersey.

The Foundation's mission is to provide greater access to African-American culture through the presentation of performing arts events and to increase performance opportunities, audience and visibility for African-American artists. Director Philip Thomas has truly taken up the plow to re-submit, re-define and re-validate the significance of Black art to Black lives, and to celebrate all year round the Black History momentum initiated by historian Carter G. Woodson 62 years ago.

The Foundation's latest presentation, "New Women-New Art" featured Abbey Lincoln (Aminata Moseka), Nikki Giovanni, Vinie



Photo by Roland L. Freeman

Sweet Honey in the Rock - (in semi-circle, l. to r.) Bernice Johnson Reagon, Aisha Kahlil, Shirley Childress Johnson, Evelyn Maria Harris, Ysaye Maria Barnwell and Nitanju Bolade

Burrows, Urban Bush Women, Ruby Dee, Sounds in Motion, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Yolanda King. These women artists, remain new because they, as artists, induce us, as participators in the art, to re-live the African-American pain and their artistic prescriptions heal us anew. Their art is, beautifully, the changing same. Changing and growing, but always, always a personification of a righteous, clenched fist eased from its tension with the renewed conviction of a Nikki Giovanni song or a Dianne McIntyre sculptured movement; all through which our tradition gracefully continues.

On April 27, at Grant Avenue Community Center in Plainfield, NJ, the festival began with Abbey Lincoln, singer, composer, actress, and concert artist. Classic collections of her compositions have been recorded with all-star bands and have

become vintage musical lyrics. When Lincoln sings, Africa sings. She is Earth Mother. The tears that rain down her face, as she moans her celebrated *Freedom Now Suite* act as a palliative to our collective weariness and enjoin us into action.

Lincoln was followed on April 28 at Passaic County College in Paterson, NJ by Nikki Giovanni, master poet, and a court of powerful local poets. Currently Professor of Creative Writing at Virginia Polytechnic, Giovanni has been on the literary scene since the 1968 publication of her work, *Black Feeling Black Talk* (Broadside Press). Giovanni writes, as if in infinite homage to the maintenance of tradition, *I am old and need/to remember/you are young and need/to learn/if i forget the words/will you remember the music/* (from "Swaziland," *The Women and*

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Sandra West is editor of *Testimony: A Journal of African-American Poetry*. Her articles have appeared in *Essence*, *Momentum* and *Metro-Newark Magazine* among other publications.

New Women...

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the Men, Morrow).

Joining Giovanni were Amini Baraka of Newark, NJ, poet/co-editor of *Confirmation: An Anthology of African-American Women* (Morrow); Linda A. H. Walker, poet with the Newark Writers Collective; Jeannette Curtis, art gallery curator and author of *I Speak to You* from Teaneck, NJ; Betty Neals, a Newark Writers Collectivemember from East Orange, NJ and author of *Spirit Weaving* and *Moving the Air*.

On April 29, the Whole Theatre Company in Montclair, NJ hosted actress Vinie Burrows and the Urban Bush Women. Burrows received, in 1986, the Paul Robeson Award from Actor's Equity Association in recognition of her commitment to human rights and her use of the arts to create understanding and respect for diversity. She has appeared in seven Broadway shows, off-Broadway

productions and international arts festivals throughout the world. Her production, *Sister, Sister* revels in the special pleasure of international woman-love and sisterhood.

Urban Bush Women is a dance-theatre ensemble that presents performance works inspired by the folklore and religious traditions of African-Americans. In reference to a solo concert by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the company's founder and artistic director, Harry Haskell of the Kansas City Star writes, "Miss Zollar is a performer who can single-handedly transform a bare stage into a village scene teeming with life...the only music came from Miss Zollar's mouth - a simple, open, throaty call that sounded like an African chant."

Ruby Dee, actress/writer and the Sounds in Motion Dance Company debuted April 30 at Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, NJ. Ms. Dee, a national treasure, began her career with the American Negro Theatre

located in the basement of the 135th Street Public Library in Harlem, surrounded by Sidney Poitier, Alice Childress, Harry Belafonte and other dramatic giants. She has been seen on film (*The Jackie Robinson Story*); on

"These women artists, remain new because... their artistic prescriptions heal us anew."

television (*Roots: The Next Generation*); on stage (*A Raisin in the Sun*); in addition to many other credits. This season, Ms. Dee and her husband, Ossie Davis, co-hosted 13 shows for the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) called *Ossie and Ruby Present* in conjunction with Howard University's WHMM-TV. And, last year, she completed a twelve-city tour of New Jersey, performing tongue-in-cheek excerpts from her book, *My One Good Nerve* (Third World Press).

Rooted in the African-American culture and soaring beyond the avant-garde, the Sounds in Motion Dance Company dance to music ranging from the classics of Duke Ellington and William Grant Still, to the new music of Olu Dara and Butch Morris. Artistic Director Dianne McIntyre's choreography is characterized by off-balance daringness, speed and the sculpturing of space by the body.

On May 1, Sweet Honey in the Rock and lecturer, Yolanda King were presented at the Whole Theatre Company. An acappella quintet, Sweet Honey in the Rock hurls out thick quilts of sound and urgent harmonies spun from the church, the street and ancient Mother Africa. They sing of Joanne Little — "She's my sister, she's my mother" — an African-American woman caught in the vise of racism, sexism and the American "just-us" system; and of freedom fighter Steven Biko of South Africa. They intone hymns like *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, sung with an unlettered, passionate, faith-filled vibrancy culled from the dusty hamlets and quarterly church meetings across the Southlands of Africa-America.

Yolanda King, (the daughter of

POSITIONS AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY

Crossroads Theatre Company, a not-for-profit equity Black regional theatre company located in New Brunswick, New Jersey is seeking applicants for the following positions:

Development Director

A dynamic, creative, aggressive person whose responsibilities include:

- Organization and implementation of ongoing fund-raising campaign
 - Key liaison to the Board of Trustees with respect to development and fund-raising
- Requirements: Previous fund-raising experience. Excellent written and oral communication skills.

Please send letter and resume to:

Rick Khan, Producing Artistic Director of Crossroads Theatre Company, 320 Memorial Parkway, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

General Manager

Responsibilities include:

- Management and daily supervision of the organization. Special attention in the marketing and fund-raising departments
- Long-range planning. Program/policy development and implementation.
- Business management, planning and analysis.
- Reports to the producing artistic director

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The Artist vs. The Contract

by James Braxton

Too many of our artists have lived, and died in poverty. And, too many have lit up the sky like a skyrocket on the 4th of July and then disappeared just as swiftly. One of the major reasons for this phenomenon is the lack of knowledge about the fine print on page 8 of their contracts. Because the legal side of show business can play almost as large a role as talent, the use of an attorney can be the difference between comfortable living and abject poverty.

If you slip, and sprain your ankle on an icy public sidewalk or on a wet floor in a department store, how do you go about getting compensation for your injury or suffering? In such cases, most people know that a discussion with a negligence attorney can mean the difference between collecting on a risk-free cash settlement instead of missing out.

However, the signing of each contract is also a risk-taking act. Just as it is suggested that you spend \$100 for an hour's consultation before representing yourself even in a Small Claims court, so too should artists seek the advice of an attorney, as well as an agent. A paid legal agent (attorney) can help the artist better understand contracts, copyrights and other agreements.

Today, somewhere near 30 million consumers are covered by prepaid legal plans. About 90% of those covered are automatically enrolled in plans paid for by their employers. The other 10%, however, are individual consumers who sign up for their own pre-paid plan after attending a presentation by a representative of a mass-marketed law plan. More of these should be artists. Along with taking an annual physical exam - artists should try a yearly 'legal' exam. If you have a signed contract, it is to your advantage to have it reviewed by an attorney. Any one clause in any contract, lease or any other legal document can be the difference between success and failure. *

James Braxton is the Vice President of New Communities, the housing arm of the Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives. He is also a representative of Syntrom Legal Services.

Black Masks

(In Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr.)

by Judah Judkins

I'm Black
Color on my skin, my personality
my life
I am Black!
Hey man, we jazz and blues a nite
Yeah, we got masks
Black masks
I am a "hell of a nigger" Black
Oops! 'no COLORED sign'
'WHITES only'
Black, color, mother africa, woza,
kaffir
Black
Cover that face of your negro eyes
Black is me
We have dreams, but
WE ALL WEAR
BLACK MASKS!



MR. B-LACK, MR. H-ARLEM,
MR. B-ALDWIN

by Judah Judkins

A small frail man.
A pen was his lamplight.
His lamplight was like
a lightbulb of an idea
ongoing as a fire.
**GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK**
Black he was
Harlem; his success
His life; a legend
His pen; IS STILL LIVING!
A Mister; a man he was
B-lack
H-arlem
B-ALDWIN!

Judah Judkins is a talented thirteen year old student from Greenburgh, New York. His family has had a subscription to Black Masks since its inception.

New Women...

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Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King) is an artist who realizes the power of theatre. With Attallah Shabazz (Malcolm X's daughter), King co-directs Nucleus, a company of performing artists, which aims to assist young Black people make the transition into maturity without too many societal or personal scars. King says, "While it is imperative to actively challenge the forces that deny human beings their right to a decent life, one must also stimulate and alter the hearts and minds of those who have been too long denied. Within the art lies this power."

New Women-New Art is only one of many Carter G. Woodson Foundation productions. Circulating primarily in New Jersey, Director Philip Thomas has a touring program that features song stylist, Carrie Smith and actor, John Patterson (who dramatizes the works of poet Langston Hughes). Also included in the touring program is "Discover Africa", a school project complete with study guides for teachers and students. Outside of New Jersey, Thomas has also presented poet/playwright Amiri Baraka at the University of California at San Diego and Tiye Giraud and Pam Patrick (of Lady Gourd Sangoma), with their stories and songs from Africa at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania.

On the drawing board is planning for a 1989 New Art Festival that will include male artists.

The touring program, "Discover Africa" school project and New Women-New Art are examples of the fine productions which result from Philip Thomas' efforts and from the art he seeks to celebrate. Under his directorship, the Foundation continues to provide an outstanding living tribute to Carter G. Woodson and his dreams.

The Carter G. Woodson Foundation is located at 69 Lincoln Park, Box 1025, Newark, NJ 07102*



Apr/May Events

(Due to the possibility of last minute changes, it is recommended that dates, times and ticket prices be verified with the individual box offices.)

Drama

Fences by August Wilson. This Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize and Drama Critics Circle Award-winning play offers an intimate look at a family caught in changing times and conflicting family values. Directed by Lloyd Richards. Featuring Billy Dee Williams, Lynne Thigpin, Roscoe Orman, Byron Keith Minns, Ray Aranha, Vince Williams and Tatyana Ali. The 46th St. Theatre, 226 W. 46th St., New York, NY (212/221-1211 or 246-0102). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 2 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$8 - \$35).

Indigo Blues by Judi Ann Mason. A spell-binding tale of two middle-aged sisters, caught in a web of guilt and denial waiting for the return of the man they both once loved. Featuring Denise Burse-Mickelbury, Melissa Fontz, Mikell Pinkney, Gwendolyn Roberts-Frost, Marice Carlton, Chuck Patterson, David Roberson and William Williams. In rotating repertory with **Come and Get These Memories** and **Reunion in Bartersville**. (See COMEDY below.) Billie Holiday, 1368 Fulton St., Bklyn. (718/636-0918). Wed. - Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 3 & 8 pm; Sun. 4 pm; (\$6 - \$12).

Joe Turner's Come and Gone by August Wilson. A story about

the Black search to re-establish lives shattered by the dispersal of families and communities early in the 20th century. Directed by Lloyd Richards. Featuring Delroy Lindo, Ed Hall, Mel Winkler, L. Scott Caldwell, Angela Bassett and Bo Rucker. Barrymore Theater, 243 W. 47th St., New York, NY (212/239-6262). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 3 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$15 - \$37.50).

Three Ways Home by Casey Kurtti. A comedic drama that tells the story of a streetwise Supermom, her 16 year-old son and a computer animator who enters their lives as an unwelcomed volunteer. Directed by Chris Silva. Featuring S. Epitha Merckerson, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and Mary McDonnell. Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St., New York, NY (212/564-8038). Previews begin May 3. Opens May 19. Tues. - Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 7 & 10; Sun. 3 & 7 pm; (\$24.50 - \$27.50).

Visual Meditations by David Finkelstein. Three women, Black, Caribbean and White, explore the consequences of life lived through the visual imagination. A Lake Ivan Performance Group production at the Medicine Show Theater, 353 Broadway, New York, NY (212/431-9545). May 26 - 29. Thurs. - Sun. 8 pm; (\$6).

West Memphis Mojo by Martin Jones. A young songwriter/shoeshine boy collaborates with the a Black barbershop owner and a small-time recording artist to create new blues tunes but the politics of the White-owned music industry of their 1955 Tennessee world brings each character's pursuit of the American dream into conflict. Directed by Rick Khan. Featuring Richard Gant, Kate Redway, Tucker Smallwood and Tico Wells. A Crossroads Theatre Company production presented by Negro Ensemble Company at Theater Four, 424 W. 55th St., New York, NY (212/246-8545). Wed. 3 (groups only) & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 3 & 8:30 pm; Sun. 2:30 & 7 pm; (\$15 - \$20).

Wet Carpets by Marian Warrington. Three sisters reunite at the high school commencement of one of their daughters and they confront the secrets that have kept them apart for many years. Crossroads Theatre Co., 320 Memorial Parkway, New Brunswick, NJ (201/249-5560). Wed. - Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 4 & 8:30 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$12 - \$22). Closes May 22.

Who's Mama's Baby, Who's Daddy's Child, written and

directed by Gertrude Jeannette. Neglected children are helped to overcome and achieve in a loving foster home. Featuring Joan Pryor, Jerry Love, Jim Willis, Kamal Edwards, Kelly Marie Berry, Rosa Mayhue, Selena Nelson, Janice Roberson and five talented youngsters. The H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players, Community Service Council of Greater Harlem, 207 W. 133rd St., New York, NY 10030 (212/862-1179/926-0281). May 20 - June 26. Fri. & Sat. 7:30 pm; Sun. 2:30 pm; (\$8; \$6, seniors; \$4, children).

Comedy

Come and Get These Memories by Pearl Cleage. A comedy about friends spending a soul-searching weekend together. **Reunion At Bartersville** by Celeste Colson Walker. A comedy about a 50th high school reunion. Each in rotating repertory with **Indigo Blues** (See DRAMA above for cast and dates). Billie Holiday, 1368 Fulton St., Bklyn. (718/636-0918).

Driving Miss Daisy, a new comedy by Alfred Uhry. Set in Atlanta, it reveals the relationship between an elderly widow and her driver. Directed by Ron Lagomarsino. Featuring Frances Sternhagen, Earle Hyman and Ray Gill. John Houseman Theater, 450 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036 (212/564-8038). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 2 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm.

Musicals

The Fruits of Miss Morning, written and directed by Elmo Terry Morgan. A poignant drama and comedy about a partial gathering of a family after the death of their extraordinary matriarch who, in life, could have passed for White and didn't. In repertory with **The Legacy**, a gospel musical by Gordon Nelson. An historical account of "Gospel" music. Directed by Elmo Terry. Featuring Wendi Franklin, Casey Scott, James McCleod, Diane Tabor, Lee Hayes, Johanna Daughtrey, Bukanda, Conrad Neblett, Esther Pulliam, Billie Scott-Lindo, Hans Eric Hageman and Tunde Samuel. The National Black Theatre, 2033 Fifth Ave., Harlem, NY 10035 (212/427-5615). Fri. & Sat. 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$12; \$10, seniors & students).

Gospel at Colonus by Lee Breuer and Bob Telson. A

magnificent musical production based on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Featuring Morgan Freeman, Robert Earl Jones, Isabell Monk, Rev. Earl F. Miller, Sam Butler, Jr. Kevin Davis, Carl Williams, Jr., Jevetta Steele, Martin Jacox, Willie Rogers, Butch Heyward, Carolyn Johnson-White and some of the greatest legends of gospel music including Clarence Fountain and the Five Blind Boys. The Lunt-Fontanne Theatre, 205 W. 46th St., New York, NY (212/675-9539). Group sales - Kojó Ade (212/575-9539). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 2 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$27 - \$47.50).

Into The Woods, a fairy-tale musical. Written and directed by James Lapine. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Featuring Phylicia Rashad, Joanna Gleason, Chip Zien, Tom Aldredge and Robert Westenberg. Martin Beck Theatre, 302 West 45th Street, New York, NY (212/947-0033). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 2 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm.

Last Tango in New Wango by Jorge Cachiero and Richard Hill. An Afro-funk multi-media musical based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Directed by Jorge Cachiero. Choreography by Sandra Kopell. Featuring Suzanne Cryer, Babo Harrison, Joe Ochman and Cameron Smith. Artspace-at ECA, 55 Audubon St., New Haven, CT (203/782-2290). May 12 - 14. Thurs. & Fri. 8:30 & 11:30 pm; Sat. 11 pm; Sun. 3 & 7:30 pm; (\$6).

Mama I Want To Sing by Vy Higginsen and Ken Wydro. A moving saga of a young girl who leaves the gospel choir to become a pop singer. Directed by Ken Wydro. The Heckscher Theater, 1230 Fifth Ave., New York, NY (212/534-2804). Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm; (\$15 - \$20).

Oba Oba, a Brazilian extravaganza. Ambassador Theatre, 49th St., New York, NY (212/239-6200). Tues. - Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 & 7:30 pm.

Sarafina! A musical about a class of South African children who create a play on the struggles of Nelson Mandela. Written and directed by Mbongeni Ngema. Music by Ngema and Hugh Masekela. Cort Theatre, 138 W. 48th St., New York, NY (212/239-6200). Tues. 8 pm; Wed. 2 & 8 pm; Thurs. & Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 2 & 8 pm; Sun. 3 pm.

A Tribute to Malcolm X, a soul musical by Titus Walker. The Ujamaa Black Theater production

APPLE
CORPS
THEATRE

presents

**Gloria Foster
Reads
Adrienne Kennedy**

Readings from
**People Who Led
to My Plays**

the new autobiography
by Adrienne Kennedy

Monday, June 6, 8 pm

Suggested contribution: \$8

**Apple Corps Theatre
336 W. 20th St.
New York, NY
212/929-2955**

Apr/May Events

at Lincoln Square Theater, 250 W. 65th St., New York, NY (212/535-4797). Fri. May 20 & 27, 8 pm; Sun. May 29, 3 pm; (\$15, advance; \$17 at door).

Yes, God Is Real, the inspirational story of a devout young man who loses his faith and finally recovers it. Book and lyrics by James M. Brown. Music by Thomas Jennings and the Rev. Charles Lyles. Directed by Al (Suave) Mitchell. Choreography by Lydia Abarca Mitchell. Featuring Wendy Mason, Betty Graves Scott, Bill Greene and Rev. Charles Lyles. Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St., New York, NY (212/864-0372). Sat. 1 & 5:30 pm; (\$16 - \$24). Group rates and dinner and show packages available. (NY: 800/426-3589; Out-of-state: 609/347-6006). Closes May 28.

Readings

Frank Silvera Writers Workshop. *The Box and The Long Good-bye* by David Smith. Director and dramaturge, Henry Miller. May 16. *Parole by Death* by Jamal Joseph. May 23. *One Man's Heaven* by Michael Dagley. Jimmy Foster, director. Chuck Wise, dramaturge. June 6. *Acres of Diamond* by Philip Hayes Dean. Beverly Jenkins, director. Pat White, dramaturge. June 13. events are at 7:30 pm; (Free). *The Obelisk* by Malik. A staged reading directed by Pat White. Fri. June 3 & Sat. June 4, 8 pm; donation accepted. Frank Silvera, 317 W. 125th St., New York, NY 10027 (212/662-8463).

Gloria Foster Reads Adrienne Kennedy. Obie Award winner, Gloria Foster heads a cast in readings from the new autobiography, *People Who Led to My Plays* by Obie Award winning playwright, Adrienne Kennedy. Directed by Michael Tolan. Apple Corps Theatre, 336 W. 20th St., New York, NY (212/929-2955). Return engagement. Mon. June 6, 8 pm; (\$8).

Richard Allen Center for Culture and Art (RACCA) Reader's Theatre. *Almost Velvet* by Larry Hughes. Directed by Susan Watson. Mon. May 16. *Gentlemen Be Seated* by Marc Primus. Directed by Glenda Dickerson. Mon. May 23. *Reflections Through a Wine Glass* by Charles Sumner. Directed by Fred Tyson. Mon. June 6. *Phoebe* by Lynn Martin. Directed by Thelma Carter. Tues. June 7. *Looking for Jane* by Kathleen Collins. Directed by Duane Jones. Mon. June 13. Dramaturges for the series include Fred Hudson, Duane Jones, Kathy Madison, Richard Harper, Marc Primus, Howard Stein and Barbara Ann Teer. All



MARY McDONNELL, S. EPATHA MERKERSON and MALCOLM-JAMAL WARNER in "THREE WAYS HOME"

readings at Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St., New York, NY (212/281-2220) 7 pm; (Free).

Selected Shorts. Four works by South African authors. *Teraloyia* by hostess, Nadine Gordimer, read by Marian Seldes. *The Prophetess* by Njabulo Ndebele. *Waiting for Leila* by Achmad Dangor and *2nd Avenue, Marabastad* by Es'kia Mphahlele. These works will be read by Fana Kekana, Tsepo Mokone and Seth Sibanda. Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th St., New York, NY 10025 (212/864-5400). Wed. May 25. Light refreshments at 5:45 pm; readings at 6:30 pm; (\$8.50; \$5, students & seniors).

Dance

Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, a gala performance. Aaron Davis Hall, W. 133rd St. & Convent Ave., New York, NY (212/997-1980). Sun. June 5, 4 pm.

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Co. From the controversial *Secret Pastures* to the evocative *Animal Trilogy*, intensely dramatic dances. City Center, 131 W. 55th St., New York, NY (212/246-8989). May 12 - 20. Thurs. 7:30 pm; Sun. 3 pm; Tues. 8 pm; Fri. 8 pm.

Crystal Reflections, a rare glimpse of Dianne McIntyre's

Sounds In Motion at home embracing the music of: Avery Brooks, Jerry Butler, Gwendolyn Nelson-Fleming, Butch Morris, Don Pullen, Little Richard, Paul Robeson and Bessie Smith. Featuring Dianne McIntyre, Phillip Bond, Kevin Gaudin, Charles Grant, Charles Malik Lewis, Kathleen Sumler, Charmaine Warren, Lacey Owsley-Wedderburn. *Sounds in Motion* Studio Theatre, 290 Lenox Ave., (125th St.), New York, NY 10027 (212/348-2460). May 5 - 22. Thurs. Fri. & Sat. 8:30 pm; Sun. 2 pm; (\$11; special rates available).

Jubilation! Dance Company featuring founder and artistic director Kevin Jeff. Exuberant, energetic joyous dancing by Brooklyn-based, 12-member Black dancing company in its New York season preview. Red Bank, NJ. May 15 - 21. (718/622-8160) for further information.

Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre, celebrating its 12th Anniversary season. New York debut of *A Tribute to Mary Lou*, the great jazz pianist/composer. Aaron Davis Hall, W. 133rd St. & Convent Ave., New York, NY (212/589-0400). May 26 - 29.

A Tribute to Larry Phillips, an evening of dance and music in honor of the late founder of Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center. Featuring Carmen de

Lavallade as Mistress of Ceremonies, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Co., Dance Theater of Harlem Workshop Ensemble, Forces of Nature and Jubilation Dance Co. Kiltgord Auditorium, New York City Technical College, 300 Jay St., Brooklyn, NY (718/875-9710). Sat. May 14, 7 pm.

Riverside Church Winter-Spring Dance Mobile. Forces of Nature does a full evening of works including *Rhythm Tree*, *From the Mud Below*, *Lam-Kavena-Ban* and *Coming Forth by Day*, choreographed by director, Abdel R. Salaam. Contact Harlem Cultural Council, (212/860-8640). May 21

Concerts

Akbar Ali - Black Swan Quartet. Akbar Ali, violinist, composer and founder of this string ensemble will perform improvisational forms of jazz and contemporary music. Quartet also features cellist, Abdul Wadud and Eileen M. Folsom and bassist, Reggie Workman. A Manna House Workshop production at Museum of the City of New York, 5th Ave. & 104th St. New York, NY (212/722-8223). Sun. June 5, 2:30 pm; (\$6; \$3, seniors, students, groups).

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Apr/May Events

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The Barry Harris Jazz Ensemble with Coleridge Taylor Perkinson, conductor. Featuring vocalist, Roberta Davis; pianist, Chris Anderson; George Kelly, tenor sax; Charles McPherson, also sax; Soby Stroman, scat dancer; Tina Pratt and Jimmy Slyde, tap dancers. Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th St., New York, NY 10025 (212/864-5400). Fri. May 27, 8 pm.

Jackie McLean Quartet, world-renowned alto saxophonist, composer and chairman of the

Hartt School of Music's Dept. of African-American Music. A concert offering the full range and reach of jazz. Fri. June 10, 8 pm. **Max Roach Double Quartet**, internationally-acclaimed performer composer/arranger, teacher. Roach's regular quartet combined with a string quartet to play as one voice reflecting the spirit of composers ranging from Scott Joplin to Charlie Parker and beyond. Thurs. June 16, 8 pm. Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th St., New York, NY 10027 (212/864-4500). (\$12, members; \$15, nonmembers.)

Special Events

Langston Hughes 2nd Annual Caribbean Festival. One - man show by Thomas Pinnock, Sat. May 28, 7:30 pm; (\$5). Outdoor Fair with vendors of objects from Caribbean and Africa. Featuring Atiba Wilson and the Urban Blues Band, 3 pm; Cheryl Byron and children's folktales, 4 pm; The Sounds of Steel (a young adult steel band), 5 pm; Sun. May 29, 1 - 8 pm. Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural

Center, 102-09 Northern Blvd., Corona, NY 11368 (718/651-1100).

Malcolm X Program. The Afrikan Poetry Theatre, 176-08 Jamaica Ave., Jamaica, NY (718/523-3212, 3312). Thurs. May 19.

Film

She's Gotta Have It by Spike Lee. Fresh, sexy, earnest Black woman expressing her needs for more than one man at a time. May 12 - 21. 20 West Theatre, 20 W. 120th St., New York, NY (212/410-2101). Tues. - Sat. 6:30 pm; (\$5, nonmembers; \$3, members).

Together Brothers. Five young Blacks search the streets of Galveston in a desperate attempt to solve the mystery surrounding the murder of their friend. Featuring Ahmad Nurradin and Anthony Wilson. Fri. May 20, 1, 4:10 & 7:10 pm. Double feature with **Cornbread, Earl and Me.** Cornbread, winner of a basketball scholarship is slain by the police and a coverup follows. Featuring Keith Wilkes, Moses Gunn, Rosalind Cash, Bernie Casey, Madge Sinclair, Laurence Fishburne III, Antonio Fargas and Thalmus Rasulala. 2:40, 5:40 & 8:40 pm. **Brothers**, a fictionalized account of the life and death of Black activist George Jackson and his relationship to Angela Davis. Featuring Bernie Casey, Vonetta McGee and Ron O'Neal. Sat. May 21, 2 & 5:10 pm. Double feature with **Together Brothers** (See description above). 3:40 & 6:50 pm. The Arts Gallery of the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office Building, 163 W. 125th St., New York, NY (212/302-0161). (\$5, adults; \$3, students with I.D. & seniors).

Exhibits

The Art of Collecting Art. Selected works from nine extremely varied private collections. The Center for African Art, 54 E. 68th St., New York, NY (212/861-1200). May 12 - Oct. 9. Tues. - Fri. 10 am - 5 pm; Sat. 11 am - 5 pm; Sun. 12 noon - 5 pm.

Art of the Dogon. Exhibition of approximately 65 works the foremost collection of the art of the Dogon people of Mali. Includes wood sculptures, forged iron, architectural sculpture among other items. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St., New York, NY (212/879-5500). Feb. 11 - July 10. Tues. 9:30 am - 8:45 pm; Wed. -

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Apr/May Events

Sun. 9:30 - 5:15 pm.
(Tax-deductible admission fee of
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Karnak, works inspired in Egypt.
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Langston Hughes Community
Library and Cultural Center,
102-09 Northern Blvd., Corona,
NY 11368 (718/651-1100). May 5 -
June 20. Mon. & Tues. 10 - 2 pm;
Wed. & Thurs. 10 - 2 pm & 6 - 8
pm; Sat. 10 - 2 pm; (Free).

**Treasures From the Permanent
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Features contemporary and
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Caribbean art — over 120 works
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sculpture, mixed media works and
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today. Continues through June 19.
The Studio Museum in Harlem,
144 W. 125th St., New York, NY
10027 (212/864-4500). Wed. - Fri.
10 am - 5 pm; Sat. & Sun. 1 - 6
pm; (\$1.50, adults; \$.50, children
and seniors; members, free).

**Vivian Browne/William T.
Williams.** An exhibit of paintings
with an essay by Lowery S. Sims.
Jamaica Arts Center, 161-04
Jamaica Ave., Jamaica, NY
(718/658-7400). Tues. - Sat. 10 am
- 5 pm. Closes June 4.

**Walker Evans: A Portfolio of
African Art.** A selection of rarely
seen photographs of African art by
this noted American
photographer. Feb. 9 - July 1.
Tues. - Fri. 1 - 4:30 pm. The
Robert Goldwater Library, Dept.
of Primitive Art. The
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St., New York,
NY (212/879-5500).

Workshops and Classes

Acting Part I for beginners,
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Dance and African Dance
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National Black Theatre, 2033
Fifth Ave., 2nd fl., New York, NY
10035 (212/866-3550). Weds. 7 -
9:30 pm.

**Black Drama Workshop for
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**Theater Performance Workshop for
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Repertory and Touring Ensemble.
Tues. 8:30 - 9:30 pm. The Center
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Surviving as an Artist, When to
Get a Lawyer, The Unions,
Headshots and Photographers,
Working in the Recording
Industry, Behind the Cameras at
Cosby. Instructors: Marcella
Lowry, Reggie Life, Glenn
Johnson, Don Farber and a
representative from CBS Records.
Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St.,
New York, NY (212/281-2220).
May 24 - June 30.

**Richard Allen Center
Youngblood Master Dance
Class Series.** Come and spend the
day with the masters of the dance
world. Foundation for the Vital
Arts, 33 E. 18th St., New York,
NY (212/281-2220). May 21 &
May 22. 11 am - 7 pm.

The Young Set

Entertainment

Langston Hughes Festival. A
choral-speaking festival of poetry
and performances by young
people. Thurs. May 19, 10 am - 2
pm; all grades, (free).

**Thunderbird American Indian
Singers and Dancers.** Dance,
song and narrative highlighting
the traditions of Native
Americans. Fri. May 20, 10:30
am; all ages. (\$2). **Nanette
Bearden Contemporary Dance
Theatre.** Dance and narrative
illustrating various ethnic
rhythms and dance forms,
contemporary jazz/tap and "street"
dancing. Fri. May 27, 10:30 am;
all ages (\$3). **Odetta,** "the most
glorious voice in American folk
music," will expose the children to
American folk traditions. Tues.
June 7, 10:30 am; all ages (\$2).
Aaron Davis Hall, W. 133rd St. &

Convent Ave., New York, NY
(212/690-6900).

Pickney Place, a children's radio
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WBAI - 99.5 FM, Wed. 5 - 5:30
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Stages Beyond

California
Tony Preston
Correspondent

The Colored Museum by George
C. Wolfe. Acclaimed satire of
Black cultural stereotypes
showcased as individual exhibits.
Mark Taper Forum, 135 N.

(continued on page 14)



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DuPois...

(continued from page 5)

production. He eliminated the speech in which she rebuffed Avery's ardent proposal. Wilson also tempered a later love scene when the ice chilling Berneice's passion begins to crack. In addition, Wilson increased Berneice's hands-on involvement with the piano. In the Yale production, Berneice had never touched the keys.

Consequently, Starletta had a lot of new dialogue to learn for the Huntington. She also had to adjust to a new leading man. Charles Dutton, a veteran Wilson actor, replaced Samuel L. Jackson as Boy Willie.

August Wilson writes wordy plays and the words require sustained concentration from the performers. The words wash over the audience like successive waves of the ocean. In an interview conducted during Starletta's short break between the Yale and Huntington productions, she acknowledged that Wilson's writing is deceptive. It seems easy but his words can be as difficult to memorize as Shakespeare's. Wilson employs a lot of repetition. The pattern of repetition is precise and must not be violated. "The cue comes before the end of the sentence," Starletta added. "His tempo is different. You have to keep the rhythm, stay right on the music of the play. You can't miss a beat. He's a musician, playwright and poet all rolled into one. He creates a collective song and, in addition, he

gives each actor an individual song. First, you have to find the collective song."

The Piano Lesson wasn't DuPois' first Wilson play. She appeared as Martha Pentecost during the Seattle engagement of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* early in the winter of 1986. Portraying Martha Pentecost was much less demanding physically and emotionally than the role of Berneice. Even though she is mentioned throughout the play, Martha Pentecost is only on stage for twenty minutes whereas Berneice is on stage for close to two hours.

Building a role as complex as Berneice takes patience. "I have to lay a foundation and put in layers for Berneice," Starletta said. "I have to see her colors. Both Lloyd [Richards] and August understand what it takes to create a role. It's such a privilege to have these two geniuses take you under their wing and help you grow. Everybody wants to be part of that family..."

August Wilson has had phenomenal success in the last four to five years. Lloyd Richards, Wilson's mentor, his director and the head of the Yale School of Drama, has not only shared in Wilson's success, he has also largely engineered it. The original director of the Broadway cast of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Richards has been a growing theatrical force since then. Now Richards, who also is head of the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference in Waterford, Connecticut,

is easily one of, if not the most powerful Black man in the theater world today.

Richards' and Wilson's collective success has put the future of *The Piano Lesson* on hold for the moment. Wilson had to withdraw *The Piano Lesson* from this season's calendar at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles because he had too many conflicting commitments.

So what is Starletta going to do now that *The Piano Lesson* is closed pending further notice? "It's good to take a break from *The Piano Lesson*. I need to go away from the piece. Berneice is a roller coaster of a role. It wears you out. You have to regenerate yourself and be fresh," Starletta says.

So, she has returned to a tour of Lorraine Hansberry's classic, *A Raisin in the Sun*, where she is playing Ruth Younger, a role that Ruby Dee originated on Broadway over 25 years ago and later portrayed on film. Starletta has just received the news that this production of *A Raisin in the Sun* is going to be filmed for public television this summer in Los Angeles. She will star opposite Danny Glover from *The Color Purple*. Esther Rolle will play Mama Younger. But first the cast, minus Danny Glover, will perform the play at the Mechanic Theater in Baltimore from April 23 at least through the third week of May.

Playing Ruth Younger is not a new challenge for Starletta. She performed the role previously, beginning at the Roundabout Theater in New York in the summer of 1986. That fall, the show went to the Kennedy Center in Washington where it surpassed the attendance record which Dustin Hoffman set in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* a few seasons ago. After D.C., the Hansberry classic traveled to the Wilshire Theater in Los Angeles. Starletta's acting in the play earned her an NAACP award.

Starletta DuPois has other film, stage and television engagements to consider also. "There's a lot of work out there now, and August Wilson has made a lot of the work possible. It's a beautiful time to be a Black artist. There's a Renaissance. This trend isn't going to blow over any time soon," she asserts confidently. *

IT'S ALL HAPPENING IN

FENCES it's Hot!

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Apr/May Events

(continued from page 12)

Grand, Los Angeles, CA
(213/972-7376). Opens May 5.

Dixieland Jazz Jubilee. World's largest Dixieland jazz festival with 100 bands from around the world. Sacramento, CA (916/327-5277). May 27 - 30.

Nobody Likes Ugly by Lorenzo Buford. A Tale of a young Black man who is emotionally repressed by his mother and grandmother, both of whom are repressed themselves. Featuring Helen Martin (227). Flight Theatre, 6472 Santa Monica, CA (213/480-3232).

One Is A Crowd, written by and starring Beah Richards. Inner City Cultural Center, 1308 S. New Hampshire Ave., Los Angeles, CA (213/387-1161). Previews May 26 - 29. Gala opening June 5 - July 31. Celebrity cast to be announced.

Sophiatown, a rousing musical tribute to the Johannesburg suburb where, in the 1940's and 50's, an egalitarian and illegal cultural renaissance flourished. A Junction Avenue Theatre Company production jointly presented by Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Parallel Season and Cal Performances in association with and performed at the Oakland Ensemble Theatre, 1428 Alice Street, Oakland, CA (415/845-4700, 839-5510, 642-9988). May 25 - June 5. Wed. - Fri. 8:30 pm; Sat. 2:30 & 8:30 pm; Sun. 2:30 & 7:30 pm except 8:30 pm Sun. June 5; (\$14 - \$16).

Georgia

Benny Andrews: Portraits, a solo exhibition. Closes June 10. **Outside the Mainstream: Folk Art in our Time.** Works by contemporary artists including Son Thomas, Nellie Mae Rowe and Ulysses Davis. May 19 - Aug. 12. High Museum at

Georgia-Pacific Center. Mon. - Fri. 11 - 5 pm; (404/577-6940).

National Black Arts Festival, "Celebration '88." 9-day festival featuring concerts, plays, musicals, dance, films, art exhibitions, cabarets and symposia by America's most distinguished Black artists. Conceived and sponsored by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, the Fulton County Arts Council and the City of Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs. July 30 - Aug. 7.

Illinois

Strange Fruit, the Billie Holiday - Lester Young Story. Written and directed by Okoro Harold Johnson. May 5 - June 19. Thurs. - Sat. 8 pm; Sun. 3 & 7 pm; (\$8; \$6, students & seniors.) **My Brother is not my Enemy** by Useni Eugene Perkins. Reading series. Mon. May 23, 7 pm; (\$3). ETA Creative Arts Foundation, Inc. 7558 South Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60619 (312/752-3955).

Maryland

The Black Aesthetic: Implications for the Classroom. Conference on the implementation of Black aesthetics in elementary and secondary school art programs. Panelists include Leslie King-Hammond and artists from Malawi, Jamaica, S. Africa and Nigeria. May 20 - 21. Fri. & Sat. (301/669-9200, ext. 219 or 220).

Michigan

Children's Classes in West African Dance & Dunham

(continued on back page)

Bulletin Board

Hearty Thanks

BLACK MASKS extends its gratitude and appreciation to the following artists and volunteers for their contribution towards the success of Footprints II:

Niamani Mutima, Producer

George Alvarez-Bouse, Marie Dutton Brown, Richard Gant, Sharon Grafton, Lady Gourd Sangoma (Pam Patrick, Tiye Giraud, Ahmondylia Best with Pat Hall-Smith) Celeste Melendez, Ruthven Meraigh, Gwen Moten, Charles Turner, Kai Turner.

You were all magnificent. Thank you!



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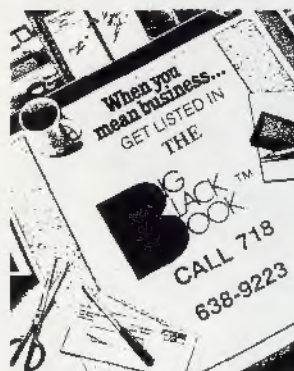
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New York's Networking Directory of
Black Businesses, Professionals
and Organizations

Apr/May Events

(continued from page 14)

Technique. Also percussion drumming and son. Ages 5 - 16. Subira Karamoko, Latifa Diop & Vieux Diop, instructors. Dansartery Studio, 1217 Griswold St., Detroit, MI. (313/342-6223). Sun. 12 - 2 pm.

A National African-American Art Marketplace, featuring the nation's best artists, craftspeople, designers and art dealers. In celebration of Juneteenth Day. The Art's Gallery, Inc. P.O. Box 06783/Linwood Station, Detroit, MI 48206 (313/835-3271; 212/584-5026).

Minnesota

Every Night When the Sun Goes Down by Phillip Hayes Dean. A compelling drama that examines the lives of very intriguing and complicated characters in the bar they call "home." Directed by Claude Purdy. Penumbra Theatre Company, Hallie Q. Brown Theatre, 270 N. Kent St., St. Paul, MN 55102 (612/224-4601). Apr. 28 - May 22. Thurs. - Sun. 8 pm; (\$7 - \$9.50).

New Jersey

Adam Wade and Jeree Palmer will appear at the Celebrity Cabaret at the Claridge Casino Hotel in Atlantic City starting May 24.

New York State

ART/Artifact, an exhibit of African art in anthropological museums. Examines the shifting status of African objects over the years from primitive artifacts to fine arts. Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, NY (716/896-5200). May 15 - Aug. 28.

PA, Philadelphia

David Simpson

Correspondent

MOMS, a slice from the life of comedienne "Moms" Mabley. Featuring Clarice Taylor. The Walnut Street Theater, 250 So. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA. Opens May 31.

Rhode Island

Children's Day by Adrienne Kennedy. Directed by Ulysses Dove. A revised interpretation of this poetic and scholarly treatment of Black folk in New England. A Rites and Reason production at Churchill House, 155 Angell St., Providence, RI (401/863-3558). May 13 - 29. Fri. & Sat. 8 pm; Sun. 3:30 & 7:30 pm; (Free). A "Folkthought" discussion follows mat. on Sun. May 29.

Tennessee

Down on Beale, a rousing musical look at the men and women who made Beale Street synonymous with the blues. Blues City Culture Center, Memphis, TN (901/525-3031). May 20 - 29.

Washington, D.C.

Courtney Long

Correspondent

The Artist's Mother: Portraits and Homages. A group exhibit including works by Benny Andrews. National Portrait Gallery. Sun. - Sat. 10 - 5:30 pm; (202/357-2920). Closes June 5.

Special Delivery: Murals for the New Deal Era. Exhibition of 70 works commissioned for post offices including *Cotton Pickers* by Ethel Magafan and *Mail Service in the Tropics* by Rockwell Kent. National Museum of American Art. 10 - 5:30 pm; Sun. - Sat. (202/357-2627). Thru Sept. 11.

Overseas Stages

Barbados

Annual Barbados Caribbean Jazz Festival. Local and regional participants as well as top U.S. jazz groups. (1-800/221-9831). May 22 - 29.

Competitions/ Opportunities

Internships for The Empire State Institute for the

Performing Arts at the Egg in Albany for Fall 1988 semester. Academic credit to select teachers, high school seniors and college undergrads and grads for completing a hands-on internship involved in the complex functioning of a large professional theater. Contact Intern Program Administrator, ESIPA at the Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 or telephone, 518/443-5222.

McDonald's 1988 Literary Achievement Awards for Writing on the Black Experience in America. A competition in poetry, fiction and playwriting. Winners in each category will receive an honorarium of \$2,000, a trip to New York for a celebrity reading of their work and a literary reception. **Eligibility Requirements:** *Fiction* - 50 pages of a long work or 2 short works; biographical statement including list of publications if any; *Poetry* - One poem no longer than 20 pages; biographical statement and list of publications. *Playwriting* - Minimum of 20 pages; biographical statement and list of all productions and places. **Deadline** - June 1, 1988. Submit your name, address and phone number and mail to: The Negro Ensemble Company, McDonald's Literary Achievement Awards, P.O. Box 778, Times Square Station, New York, NY 10108. Finalists notified by July 1 and winners by Aug. 1. Materials will not be returned.

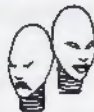
Third Annual Theodore Ward Prize for Playwriting. **Eligibility:** Writers of African-American descent and US residents; full-length unproduced plays only (free amateur or college productions eligible); No one-acts

or musicals except for plays with music; Adaptations and translations are not eligible unless from works in public domain; All rights for music or biographies must be secured by entrant prior to submission; One script per playwright. All manuscripts must be typed and bound. Include personal resume, synopsis of play and a script history. **First Prize** - \$2,000, fully mounted production in 1988-89 Studio season at Columbia College, Chicago, IL, transportation and housing in Chicago. **Second Prize** - \$500, a staged reading and an audio tape of the reading. **Deadline** Postmarked by July 1, 1988. Send submissions to Mr. Steve Long, Columbia College, Theater/Music Center, 72 E. 11th St., Chicago, IL 60605. Winners will be announced on Oct. 17, 1988. Scripts with self-address stamped envelope will be returned to entrants.

Books

Goodbye, Sweetwater. A long-overdue collection of the late Henry Dumas' powerful fiction whose penetrating force, humor and savage clarity make vivid the richness of the Black experience in America. Edited and with a foreword by Eugene B. Redmond. Thundermouth Press, 93-99 Greene St., Suite 2A, New York, NY 10012, Apr. 88. \$19.95, hardcover; \$9.95, paperback.

Translated From The Night by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo. Translated by R.W. Rinehart. A book of poetry by the Malagasy author who is acknowledged as Africa's first modern poet. N.J.: Soma Press, P.O. Box 7242, Rochelle Park, NJ 07662, 1987. (\$7).



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Black Masks

Spotlight on Black Art

1993

**Starletta
DuPois:
Broadway
Bound!**

**Lawyers
and
Artists**

Poetry

**Black Theatre
and Arts
Listings**

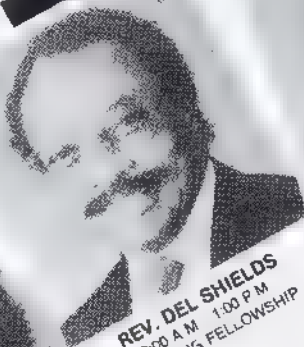
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Starletta DuPois

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Black Masks

Apr/May 1988

Vol. 4, No.8

FEATURES

Starletta DuPois: On the August Wilson Express 4
by Barbara Brewster Lewis

Having created the role of Berneice in August Wilson's regional productions of his latest play, *The Piano Player*, it seems only a matter of time before Starletta DuPois barrels down the Wilson/Richards track to Broadway.

New Women-New Art: A Festival of Women Artists 6
by Sandra West

Carter G. Woodson Foundation's director, Philip Thomas, gathered some of Black America's major women performers to storm New Jersey with a five-day, multi-sited entertainment blitz.

The Artist vs. The Contract 8
by James Braxton

A short word on the importance of legal assistance in the building of a career in the arts.

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Two poems by a talented 13 year old student.

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Editor's Notes



by Bert Andrews

Beth Turner

On Building a National Network

On April 23, the Kentucky Arts Council's Civil Rights Advisory Committee hosted a one-day African-American Arts Development Forum. I was invited by the forum organizer and *Black Masks* subscriber, Judyie Al-Bilali, to speak on a panel that was comprised of theatre historian, Freda Scott as moderator; Rick Khan, one of the founders and current producing artistic director of Crossroads Theater in New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Larry Leon Hamlin, the founding director of North Carolina Black Repertory Company in Winston-Salem. Khan and Hamlin were each to talk about one of their major points of expertise: How to establish a successful arts organization. I was to talk about keeping *Black Masks* successfully afloat also, not just as an independent business but as a tool for building a national Black arts network.

When I first saw my name in the forum brochure under the topic of "Building a National Network," it was very sobering. Certainly *Black Masks* had been created under much more modest impulses. As a matter of fact, one of the biggest laughs I had had when struggling to create the first five-page issue, was at one very supportive friend who enthusiastically told me that *Black Masks* would not stay a New York-based newsletter, as I had envisioned, but would become a magazine serving Black art across the country and even abroad. How incredible that sounded to me as I sat

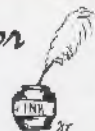
at my desk in the middle of the night, up to my elbows in rubber cement, wondering if I would ever even manage to get just one column pasted up perfectly straight.

Yet, largely due to word-of-mouth (because we have never had the funds to do large-scale promotion), subscribers to *Black Masks* can indeed be found across the United States from East to West, North to South, Hawaii and Alaska included. Although many of these out-of-state subscribers may never get to New York to take advantage of our local listings of current events, they treasure *Black Masks* for the link it provides to other Black artists, who, despite their sense of working in isolation, are also still painstakingly struggling to continue to build our national Black arts heritage. It is this need for communication between fellow artists and art supporters across the country which has defined the importance of *Black Masks* as a tool for national networking.

The impact of this sense of community was eloquently expressed by Maggie Porter of Harmonie Park Playhouse Actors Lab, Detroit, Michigan in a letter which accompanied her request for two subscriptions. "Thank you, thank you, thank you! for *Black Masks*...For a moment there, I was beginning to feel we were fast disappearing, or at least losing our commitment, courage and enthusiasm for the inevitable struggle to stay alive. Through *Black Masks*, it is very clear we're alive." It is this kind of appreciation that has kept us plugging away at this publication when everything rational and sane said to stop.

In a renewed determination to reach out, *Black Masks* is very pleased to announce a recent agreement with publishers, Gumbs & Thomas, who are going to be promoting *Black Masks* to the extensive library, college and arts organization network they have developed for the distribution of their publications. We look upon this new working partnership as a major step in complimenting our subscribers' word-of-mouth efforts in helping us to truly build the national Black arts network our artists and arts organizations need and deserve. *

Letters to the Editor



Networking

You are doing a great job!

I sent a copy of your magazine to Benny Ambush with Oakland Ensemble Theatre (CA) last year to keep the network going. Now I see he sends info about happenings with his theatre. He's obviously impressed too!!

I would like to echo the suggestion of Susan Watson Turner in Letter to the Editor, Mar/Apr. [A call for a casting/employment classified section particularly for the regional and university arts market.]

Darell Richardson
Jersey City, NJ

The Debate Goes On

Please do not lower the publication by having a personal ads column. I am a female actor who is interested in keeping abreast of Black plays, readings and performances around the country. That is why I have subscribed to *Black Masks*. If I wanted to meet members of the opposite sex, there are any number of magazines and services available on the market. I personally do not consider this an acceptable way to meet people and feel that it would be an intrusion on my reading material.

Once again, I enjoy *Black Masks*. Keep up the good work. I look forward to the next issue.

Sharon Hope
Brooklyn, NY

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Send articles, query letters or proposals to: *Black Masks*, P.O. Box #2, Bronx, NY 10471.

Starletta DuPois: On the August Wilson Express

by Barbara Brewster Lewis

Starletta DuPois opens the door to her New York apartment. The actress is wearing a bright tomato red sweat suit. Her light brown eyes are warm and friendly. She welcomes me inside. The walls of her large rectangular living room are pale blue. The windows look out onto Lenox Avenue. At night, the view must be spectacular. Starletta sits next to me on the white couch, one of two sofas in the spacious and airy room. In the far corner of the room, two high-backed antique mahogany chairs with maroon cushions add an air of timeless elegance. There is no clutter anywhere.

We begin to converse. She admits that every now and then she thinks about what her life would have been if she had chosen a more secure career. But those moments of wonder are rare. Ninety-five percent of the time she's glad she decided to climb onto the theatrical seesaw and take her chances. Even if it means financial sacrifice, Starletta refuses to accept every role that's offered; she's particular. She believes that "if I am careful and caring about the kinds of roles I choose, then over the long haul I will make it." She doesn't want to project a negative image that will haunt her later or trouble her conscience. Cicely Tyson and Ruby Dee, Black actresses known for being selective, are her models.

DuPois was on her way to becoming a doctor when a glimmer of the theatrical footlights caught her attention. She was studying biology at the University of Maryland when she decided to appear, for diversion, in her first amateur production. Her ambitions were never the same again. It wasn't simply the potential for money that attracted her to the stage. It was the spotlight itself that beckoned.

After graduation, Starletta headed for New York. She arrived in the early seventies, an exciting period for Blacks in the theater. There was a lot of work, primarily at the Henry

Barbara Brewster Lewis writes often about the theater. She also teaches Freshman Exposition at New York University.



Photo by Gerry Goodstein

Starletta DuPois (Berneice) and Rocky Carroll (Lyman) in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

Street Settlement where Woodie King presided and at the Negro Ensemble Company run by Douglas Turner Ward. Starletta performed often (most notably in Ron Milner's *What the Wine Sellers Buy* and in Ed Bullins' *House Party* at the American Place Theater), each time deepening her theatrical skill. Sometimes, she received little more than carfare for her efforts, especially in the beginning. But she was doing what she enjoyed most, and she knew that the big money would come.

During that early period, the closest she came to stardom was in 1978 when she received a Tony nomination for her role as Rita in

Richard Wesley's *The Mighty Gents*. Unfortunately, Wesley's drama about life on the mean ghetto streets lasted only a week on Broadway. Two years later, Starletta moved to Los Angeles where she worked in television and film. Her combined credits include *Hollywood Shuffle*, *St. Elsewhere*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Network*, *Death Wish*, *Falcon Crest*, *Knot's Landing*, *The Equalizer* and *Amazing Grace*.

While in Los Angeles, Starletta also earned her Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from UCLA, and became affiliated with a church. That association is very important to her; it gives expression to her nurturing

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DuPois...

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side. "There's more to the world than performing," she says. Between shows, DuPois returns to L.A. to maintain her ties to her congregation. Through her home church in Los Angeles, she participates in a program to feed approximately 3,000 homeless people a week. Her religious affiliation has also given her a "firm foundation" to withstand the pitfalls of life in glitterdom and to weather the dark and difficult times when good roles were scarce. Now she's back in New York stronger than ever and poised for success.

Recently, Starletta DuPois triumphed in Boston and New Haven as the female lead in *The Piano Lesson*, written by August Wilson and directed by Lloyd Richards. She played Berneice, the attractive and strong-willed young widow who moved north to live with her uncle Doaker in Pittsburgh. Even though Berneice Charles predates *A Raisin*

in the Sun's Ruth Younger by two decades, Berneice is more independent and self-assertive. Berneice left Mississippi in the early 1930's hoping to sever her ties from a painful past. (Her husband, Crawley, was killed unexpectedly in a shootout with the law.) Berneice relocated to Pittsburgh to provide a better life for herself and her eleven year old daughter, Maretha.

The Piano Lesson opens with an insistent knock on the front door of the row house Berneice, Doaker and Maretha share in Pittsburgh in 1936, at the height of the Depression. Boy Willie, Berneice's brother whom she hasn't seen in three years — not since the night her husband, Crawley, was shot — has come north suddenly with his friend, Lymon. They've brought a truckload of watermelons to sell, but Boy Willie's overriding purpose is to sell the piano that he and Berneice inherited from their parents.

Berneice, however, is adamant about keeping the upright, which

stands in Doaker and her living room and has been in the family for generations. Moreover, she wants Maretha to learn to play the piano and eventually to give lessons. Berneice feels the piano is priceless.

"If I am careful and caring about the kinds of roles I choose, then over the long haul I will make it."

The family geneology dating back to slavery is carved on the legs of the piano. To sell the piano would be tantamount to selling the family's history. Boy Willie, on the other hand, feels that the piano is serving no useful purpose. He feels it should be sold so he can use his portion of the inheritance to buy something of real value, land in Mississippi. The struggle between Berneice and Boy Willie symbolizes the question central to *The Piano Lesson*: What is the best way for the current generation to honor its debt to the past?

The Piano Lesson will probably open on Broadway a year from now. It premiered to an enthusiastic audience at Yale at the end of November and then moved to the Huntington in Boston. The show closed there the last weekend in January after three weeks of performance. The last Friday night of the run, people were sitting two and three-deep on the aisle steps of the balcony. There was not one seat left in the entire 850-seat theater.

During the reception to celebrate the Yale opening, it was Starletta's role that received the most controversial attention especially the scene when Berneice told Avery (who had followed her north from Mississippi) that she wasn't ready to discuss marriage yet. She had invested, she told him, so much of herself to build up her late husband that she didn't know whether she was willing or able to make that kind of commitment again. There was a great deal of audience and critical reaction to the persona of Berneice. She was viewed as an early feminist, an independent, free-thinking woman far ahead of her time. Her assertiveness was regarded as out of step in 1936.

Wilson changed Berneice's role considerably for the Boston

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